

GOVERNANCE

Menace of Manual Scavenging

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment informed the Lok Sabha that 22 people had died while Manual Scavenging in 2021 so far. According to the National Convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan, 472 manual scavenging deaths across the country were recorded between 2016 and 2020. Safai Karmachari Andolan is a movement for elimination of manual scavenging.

Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees 'Right to Life' and that also with dignity. This right is available to both citizens and non-citizens.

Key Points

Manual Scavenging:

- Manual scavenging is defined as "the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers".

Reasons for the Prevalence:

- **Indifferent Attitude:** A number of independent surveys have talked about the continued reluctance on the part of state governments to admit that the practice prevails under their watch.
- **Issues due to Outsourcing:** Many times local bodies outsource sewer cleaning tasks to private contractors. However, many of them fly-by-night operators, do not maintain proper rolls of sanitation workers. In case after case of workers being asphyxiated to death, these contractors have denied any association with the deceased.
- **Social Issue:** The practice is driven by caste, class and income divides.
 1. It is linked to India's caste system where so-called lower castes are expected to perform this job.
 2. In 1993, India banned the employment of people as manual scavengers (The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993), however, the stigma and discrimination associated with it still linger on. This makes it difficult for liberated manual scavengers to secure alternative livelihoods.

Steps Taken:

- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:** The act seeks to reinforce the prohibition of manual scavenging in all forms and ensures the rehabilitation of manual scavengers.
- **Prevention of Atrocities Act:** It delineates specific crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **National Commission of Safai Karmacharis:** The Commission is acting as a non-statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment whose tenure is extended from time to time through Government Resolutions.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a national campaign launched by the Government on 2nd October, 2014 to clean the streets, roads and build social infrastructure of the country.
- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020:** It proposes to completely mechanise sewer cleaning, introduce ways for 'on-site' protection and provide compensation to manual scavengers in case of sewer deaths. It will be an amendment to The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
- **Safai Mitra Suraksha Challenge:** It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on World Toilet Day (19th November) in 2020. The Government launched this "challenge" for all states to make sewer-cleaning mechanised by April 2021 — if any human needs to enter a sewer line in case of unavoidable emergency, proper gear and oxygen tanks, etc., are to be provided.
- **'Swachhta Abhiyan App':** It has been developed to identify and geotag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.
- **SC Judgement:** In 2014, a Supreme Court order made it mandatory for the government to identify all those who died in sewage work since 1993 and provide Rs. 10 lakh each as compensation to their families.

Way Forward

- **Proper Identification:** States need to accurately enumerate the workers engaged in cleaning toxic sludge.
- **Empowering Local Administration:** With Swachh Bharat Mission identified as a top priority area by the 15th Finance Commission and funds available for smart cities and urban development providing for a strong case to address the problem of manual scavenging.
- **Social Sensitisation:** To address the social sanction behind manual scavenging, it is required first to acknowledge and then understand how and why manual scavenging continues to be embedded in the caste system.
- **Need For a Stringent Law:** If a law creates a statutory obligation to provide sanitation services on the part of state agencies, it will create a situation in which the rights of these workers will not hang in the air.

AGRICULTURE

Use of Drone in Pesticide Application

Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has released Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for drone application in Agriculture. The use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) commonly known as drones have great potential to revolutionize Indian agriculture and ensure the country's food security.

The drones were used for the first time in warding off locust attacks in various states of the country.

Earlier, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had launched a Drone-Based vaccine delivery model named, Drone Response and Outreach in North East (i-Drone).

Key Points

About Standard Operating Procedures (SOP): The SOP for drone regulation for pesticide application covers:

- Important aspects like statutory provisions, flying permissions, area distance restrictions, weight classification, overcrowded areas restriction, drone registration, safety insurance, piloting certification, operation plan, air flight zones, weather conditions,
- SOPs for pre, post and during operation, emergency handling plan.

Drone Technology in Use of Application of Pesticides:

- **Pesticides:** Pesticides are one of the important agri-inputs to address protection of crops against a large number of pests that can wash away entire investment of farmers and hence they act as an essential input that yields substantial returns to the farmers.
- **Conventional Spraying of Pesticide:** Conventional methods of pesticide spray application lead to several problems like:
 1. Excessive application of chemicals, lower spray uniformity, unnecessary deposition and non-uniform coverage.
 2. Resulting in excessive usage, water & soil pollution as well as higher expenditure on pesticides.
 3. With conventional manual sprayers, the safety of operators is also a major concern.
- **Use of Drone Technology:** The use of drone technology as a modern farming technique is aimed at making production more efficient through precise spraying of pesticides and crop nutrients. This approach would not only ensure accuracy, uniformity in spray across the field, reduction in the overall use of chemicals within the area, but will also take care of the safety of the operators.

Other Uses of Drone Technology in Agriculture & Their Advantages:

- **Crop Monitoring:** Drones are well-equipped with many features like multi-spectral and photo cameras. Drones can be used for assessing the health of any vegetation or crop, field areas inflicted by weeds, infections and pests.
- **Optimum Nutrient Delivery:** Based on an assessment, the exact amounts of chemicals needed to fight infestations can be applied thereby optimizing the overall cost for the farmer. This will further help in doubling farmer's income by 2022.
- **Better Crop Management:** Drone planting systems have also been developed by many start-ups which allow drones to shoot pods, their seeds and spray vital nutrients into the soil.
 1. Thus, this technology increases consistency and efficiency of crop management, besides reducing the cost.

2. This will help in enhancing the productivity as well as efficiency of the agriculture sector.
3. Use of drones in agriculture may also give ample opportunities to provide employment to people in rural areas.

Rules for Drone Regulations in India

- Drone Rules, 2021.
- National Counter Rogue Drones Guidelines 2019.

ECONOMY

Depreciation of Rupee

The Indian currency declined 2.2% in the Sep-Dec 2021 quarter. This depreciation of currency is due to global funds worth \$4 billion having been pulled out of the country's stock market. This downfall of currency makes the Indian rupee as Asia's worst-performing currency.

Key Points

About Depreciation:

- Currency depreciation is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system.
- Rupee depreciation means that the rupee has become less valuable with respect to the dollar.
 1. It means that the rupee is now weaker than what it used to be earlier.
 2. For example: USD 1 used to equal to Rs. 70, now USD 1 is equal to Rs. 76, implying that the rupee has depreciated relative to the dollar i.e. it takes more rupees to purchase a dollar.

Impact of Depreciation of Indian Rupee:

- Depreciation in rupee is a double-edged sword for the Reserve Bank of India.
 1. Positive: While a weaker currency may support exports amid a nascent economic recovery from the pandemic.
 2. Negative: It poses risk of imported inflation, and may make it difficult for the central bank to maintain interest rates at a record low for longer.

Appreciation vs Depreciation of Currency

- In a floating exchange rate system, market forces (based on demand and supply of a currency) determine the value of a currency.
- **Currency Appreciation:** It is an increase in the value of one currency in relation to another currency.
 1. Currencies appreciate against each other for a variety of reasons, including government policy, interest rates, trade balances and business cycles.
 2. Currency appreciation discourages a country's export activity as its products and services become costlier to buy.
- **Currency Depreciation:** It is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system.
 1. Economic fundamentals, political instability, or risk aversion can cause currency depreciation.
 2. Currency depreciation encourages a country's export activity as its products and services become cheaper to buy.

Devaluation And Depreciation

- In general, devaluation and depreciation are often used interchangeably.
- They both have the same effect – a fall in the value of the currency which makes imports more expensive, and exports more competitive. However, there is a difference in the way they are applied.
- A devaluation occurs when a country's central bank makes a conscious decision to lower its exchange rate in a fixed or semi-fixed exchange rate.
- A depreciation is when there is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate.

Reasons for Current Depreciation of Indian Rupee:

- **Record-High Trade Deficit:** India's trade deficit widened to an all-time high of about \$23 billion in November amid higher imports. This growing trade deficit is driven by a rebound in oil prices.
- **Policy divergence Between RBI and Federal Reserve:** The strengthening of USD in line with expectations of better growth in the US economy and favorable interest offered by the

Federal Reserve (US' Central bank). The RBI has been continuously buying dollars to build its reserves and prepare itself for any volatility.

- **Outflow of Capital:** Foreign capital exodus from stocks have led to the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex Index falling by about 10% below an all-time high touched in October 2021.
- **Omicron Concerns:** When concerns about the omicron virus variant are roiling the global markets.

PRELIMS FACT

Chillai Kalan

One of the harshest winter periods of 40 days, called Chillai Kalan, has begun in Kashmir.

Key Points

About:

- It is the harshest winter period in Kashmir starting from 21st December to 29th January every year.
- Chillai Kalan is a Persian term that means 'major cold'.
- Chillai-Kalan is followed by a 20-day long Chillai Khurd (small cold) that occurs between January 30 and February 18 and a 10-days long Chillai Bachha (baby cold) which is from February 19 to February 28.
- The 40-day period brings a lot of hardships for Kashmiris as the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies, including the famous Dal Lake here.
- During these 40 days, the chances of snowfall are the highest and the maximum temperature drops considerably. The minimum temperature in the Valley hovers below the freezing point.

Impact on Daily Life of Kashmiris:

- Use of Pheran (Kashmiri dress) and a traditional firing pot called Kanger increases.
- Due to subzero temperature, tap water pipelines freeze partially during this period and world-famous Dal Lake also freezes.
- Kashmiris celebrate with sumptuous Harissa, a dish made of lean mutton mixed with rice and flavoured with spices like fennel, cardamom, clove and salt.
- Besides, they frequently consume dried vegetables as there is shortage of fresh supplies due to blocking of roads following heavy snowfall.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. The consequences of poor nutrition are too costly for society to ignore and hence unrelenting focus is needed to tackle malnutrition. Analyse. (250 words)

Ans:

Introduction

India, currently has the largest number of undernourished people in the world i.e. around 195 million. Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India do not meet their full human potential because of chronic undernutrition or stunting. India ranks 94/ 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2020. Malnutrition is caused by a lack or imbalance of certain types of nutrients necessary for a healthy life.

Body

Consequences of Poor nutrition

- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 shows negligible gains in nutritional outcomes among under-five children.
- There has been tardy progress in reducing undernutrition, wasting and stunting.
- It is a national shame that even now, 5% of under-five children are stunted and 19.3% are wasted.
- Childhood anaemia has worsened from NFHS-4.
- Anaemia among adolescent girls and women aged 15-49 has also worsened.
- Malnutrition results in a reduced ability to work and increased susceptibility to disease, and depending on the nutrients lacking: anaemia, blindness, mental retardation, or death.
- India loses 4% of its GDP annually due to malnourishment.

Measures needed

- **Continued monitoring :** After monitoring the successful initiation of breastfeeding in the hospital, anganwadi workers, ASHA workers and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives must continue to monitor exclusive breastfeeding till the infant is six months old. They must record the timely initiation of complementary feeding with soft gruel

- **Ration supply without break** : We must also ensure that there is take-home ration for under-three children through the regular supply of supplementary nutrition from the Integrated Child Development Services.
- **Monitoring PDS** : Real-time monitoring of the Public Distribution System (PDS) will go a long way in ensuring food at the family level.
- **Community involvement** : Both Poshan Abhiyan and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana need to be monitored with the help of the community to ensure sustainable nutrition security.
- **Other measures**
 1. Whether anganwadis are intermittently closed without any valid reason;
 2. whether the supervisors are erratic in field monitoring;
 3. how we can capture the regularity and quantity of dry rations supplied to anganwadi centres and schools for mid-day meals;
 4. whether there is live web-based centrally monitorable data on the movement of dry rations to anganwadis and schools;
 5. whether parents and teachers can monitor the serving of hot, cooked meals;
 6. whether self-help groups of women are involved in preparing the menu and procuring locally available vegetables, grains and millets to ensure dietary diversification
 7. whether eggs are being denied or stopped for sociopolitical reasons.
 8. Food fortification of staples (including wheat, flour, rice and edible oils)
 9. It represents a cost-effective and scalable solution to enhance nutrient intake.
 10. Standards for food fortification should be established, and guidelines changed to promote the use of fortified inputs in ICDS-provided hot cooked meals.
- **Increasing dietary diversity**
 1. It is the preferred way of improving the nutrition of a population because it has the potential to improve the intake of many food constituents like antioxidants and probiotics not just micronutrients simultaneously.
 2. There are several low-cost, food-based measures that can be promoted at the community level to improve micro nutrient status.
- **Culturally appropriate dietary modifications**
 1. should be developed to help people identify concrete actions that can improve both dietary supply and the absorption of micronutrients.
 2. This information needs to be disseminated to the public through traditional information channels.
- **Public-private partnerships** : Private sector engagement can leverage technological solutions for scaling up food fortification initiatives, and complement the government's outreach efforts through mass awareness and education campaigns in communities.

Conclusion

Prioritizing early childhood nutrition is key to ensuring India's development rests on strong and steady shoulders. India's ability to harness long-term demographic dividends rests on it prioritizing nutrition in its health agenda, and reforming the institutional framework through which interventions are delivered.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. With reference to Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, consider the following statements:

1. It prohibits a person from consuming any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
2. It extends to the whole of India except Union Territories (UT's).
3. It applies to all Indian citizens outside India and to all persons on ships and aircraft registered in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Consider the following statements about International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC):

1. It is a multi-modal transportation established in 2000 for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation among the Member States.
2. This corridor connects India Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Pakistan.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

- a. **1 only**
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q3. Consider the following statements about “Compensatory Afforestation Funds”:

1. As per the rules, 10% of the CAF money is to be given to the states while 90% is to be retained by the Centre.
2. These funds will be regulated by National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. **Neither 1 nor 2**

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”.
2. A disturbed area is one which is declared by President of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. **1 only**
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q5. Consider the following statements about Bank for International Settlements:

1. It is an international financial organisation owned by World Bank.
2. It serves as a bank for central banks.
3. It's headquarter is in Basel, Switzerland.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. **2 and 3 only**
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3